

become competitive with China and Asia and other competition.

We know Colombia, a democracy, as a reliable partner and ally. We know that Colombia is the oldest democracy in Latin America. And we also recognize that President Uribe of Colombia is our hemisphere's most popular elected official with over 80 percent approval ratings. Compare that to this Congress, which has a 15 percent approval rating. Big difference.

Now, there are those who oppose the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. They say that Colombia, amongst all the good things it's done, just hasn't done enough regarding violence against labor leaders. Let's remember that Colombia has had 40 years of civil strife driven by left-wing guerrillas trying to overthrow the democratically elected government of Colombia. But today, 71 percent of Colombians say they feel more secure under President Uribe; 73 percent say Uribe respects human rights. Those are Colombians, not Americans, saying that.

Homicides are down 40 percent in Colombia; kidnappings are down 76 percent. The murder rate today in Medellin, once the poster child of violence in Colombia, one of the most dangerous cities on the planet, today has a lower murder rate than Washington, DC, or Baltimore.

But let's look at the facts on labor violence. President Uribe has made major changes, beginning with reforming the judiciary. He has had hired 418 new prosecutors, 545 new investigators. In fact, in the Prosecutor General's Office, responsible for targeting those who are responsible for the violence in Colombia, they've added over 2,000 new posts.

Funding has gone up 75 percent in the last few years alone under President Uribe. And quoting Carlos Rodriguez, president of the United Workers Confederation, a labor leader in Colombia: "Never in the history of Colombia have we achieved something so important." Again, that's a Colombian labor leader.

President Uribe and Colombia, under the government initiatives, have worked to protect labor leaders, giving them special protections. Last year, they spent over \$38 million for body guard protection for labor union leaders; 1,500 union members and activists received special protection, the second largest protected group in Colombia, and it's been successful. For labor activists under this program, none have lost their lives. And I would note that the murder rate today for labor unionists is lower than the national murder rate for everyone else.

So progress has been made.

And I would note that crimes categorized as anti-union violence often are not union related, but regular crime that everyone in Colombia has contended with, many are the responsibility of the leftist FARC.

I would note that the International Labor Organization has removed Colombia from its labor watch list. Co-

lombia has agreed to a permanent ILO representative in Colombia. And perhaps most telling, 14 Colombian labor leaders have given their support to the trade agreement.

The bottom line is, ladies and gentlemen, this agreement is good for Illinois workers, it's good for Illinois manufacturers, it's good for Illinois farmers. Let's bring it up for a vote. I ask my colleagues to support this important trade agreement. And I will also include for the RECORD a copy of an "Economist" article talking about President Hugo Chavez and the FARC and their opposition to this agreement.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, March 10, 2008.

DEAR COLLEAGUE: Please read this informative recent article from The Economist about FARC narcoterrorists in Colombia and troubling links with the Chavez administration in Venezuela. As noted below, "Mr. Chavez, still with oil money but politically on the defensive, may have thrown in his lot with an outlaw army of drug-traffickers."

Now more than ever we must support the pending Trade Promotion Agreement with our neighbor and friend Colombia.

Sincerely,

JERRY WELLER,
Member of Congress.

(From The Economist, Mar. 6, 2008)

COLOMBIA IS MOVING CLOSER TO BREAKING THE FARC—UNLESS VENEZUELA STOPS IT

On few, if any, other occasions has a head of state issued detailed orders for military mobilization as jauntily as if he were ordering pizza, and on live television. That is what Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's president, did on March 2nd, after Colombian forces bombed a camp just inside Ecuador, killing Raul Reyes, a senior commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas.

"Minister of defence!" bellowed Mr. Chavez, on "ALó PRESIDENTE" ("Hello President"), his weekly radio and television programme. "Send me ten battalions to the border, including tanks." He also ordered the forward deployment of his new Russian fighter-bombers, threatening that if Colombia's president, Alvaro Uribe, tried a similar raid on Venezuelan soil he would "send over the Sukhois". The next day he broke diplomatic ties with Colombia.

Venezuelan troops and tanks duly moved to the more populated points of the long border between the two countries. Customs officials halted Colombian trucks at the busiest crossing point, between Cucuta and San Cristobal.

What made this performance odd was that it was Ecuador, not Venezuela, whose sovereignty had been violated. True, Colombia has often accused Venezuela of harbouring guerrilla leaders and tolerating camps near the border similar to the one bombed in Ecuador. But did Venezuela's president have a guilty conscience?

"Maybe he knew what was coming," wrote Teodoro Petkoff, a guerrilla leader in the 1960s who now edits an opposition newspaper in Caracas. Mr. Chavez's apparent over-reaction was a pre-emptive attempt to "throw a veil over the revelations he suspected might come from Raul Reyes' computer," suggested Mr. Petkoff.

With Ecuador's president, Rafael Correa, following Mr. Chavez's lead, this week's events sent Latin America's diplomats scurrying to prevent war enveloping the neighbourhood. But they also laid bare that Colombia's government is coming close to

breaking the back of the FARC, and in the process threatening to shine light on its murky relations with neighbouring governments.

When Mr. Uribe took office in 2002, the guerrillas were rampant. His predecessor had just halted peace negotiations because the FARC had used a "demilitarised" zone created to host the talks as a base for recruitment and for kidnapping (many of the politicians it has held hostage were seized during the talks). The guerrillas had some 17,000 troops; they blocked main roads and bombarded small towns, kidnapping and killing almost at will. To make matters worse, the state's inability to provide security had spawned murderous right-wing paramilitary groups.

Mr. Uribe's "democratic security" policy has achieved a dramatic change. By expanding the security forces, he has driven the FARC from populated areas, while persuading most of the paramilitaries to demobilize. Officials reckon they have reduced the FARC's ranks to fewer than 11,000. But the guerrillas withdrew to the vast tropical lowlands, to areas they have controlled for 40 years. There they resisted a two-year offensive by 18,000 troops. The army could not get near the FARC's seven-man governing secretariat, of which Mr. Reyes (the NOM DE GUERRE of Luis Edgar Devia) was a member.

SEEKING THE SECRETARIAT

Thwarted, the security forces refined their strategy. They put more effort into seeking the FARC's leaders using information from guerrilla deserters and infiltrators, and from sophisticated bugging equipment provided by the United States. Over the past year, this has started to pay off. Two FARC regional commanders have been killed and one captured. In January and February alone, the army claims to have killed 247 guerrillas and captured 226, with another 360 deserting. This pressure has pushed FARC units to the borders with Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama.

Last month the government received a tip-off that Mr. Reyes was in a camp less than two kilometers (1.25 miles) inside Ecuador. Mr. Uribe authorized a bombing raid by Brazilian-made Super Tucano aircraft, which killed at least 21 guerrillas. Colombian troops then crossed the border to recover Mr. Reyes's corpse—and his laptop computers. (They left three wounded women guerrillas unattended.)

Most Colombians were jubilant that the government had struck at the very top of the FARC at last. Mr. Reyes handled the guerrillas' relations with the outside world; he was one of three deputies to Manuel Marulanda, the FARC's elderly leader. For the first time the security forces have shown that they are capable of infiltrating and defeating the guerrillas' tough systematic strikes, said Roman Ortiz of Fundacion Ideas para la Paz, a Bogota think-tank.

Mr. Uribe doubtless thought that Mr. Correa could be mollified over the cross-border raid. But spurred on by Mr. Chavez, Ecuador's president sent 3,200 troops to the border and cut diplomatic ties. He demanded an emergency meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) to condemn Colombia, and set off on a tour of regional capitals seeking support.

THE LAPTOP LODGE

Almost as important as the killing of Mr. Reyes may be the capture of his laptops. Apart from inside information on the FARC, according to Colombian officials, they contain documents which—if true—are embarrassing to Mr. Correa but highly damaging to Mr. Chavez. As the FARC's top negotiator,